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ABSTRACT

Through this review of several research studies, racial prejudice in young children is documented and the need is addressed for establishing a multicultural education program beginning with preschool children. A schema and a supporting rationale for such a multicultural program are stated in order to provide a direction for planners, and curriculum ideas are proposed. In addition, the approach described applies a multicultural emphasis to those kinds of activities and experiences normally found in most good preschool programs. It is recommended that, along with the provision of activities with a multicultural emphasis, young children's natural developmental curiosity and tendency toward exploration be used in an effort to help them develop a realistic and positive self-identity as well as the ability to accept others. (Author/MP)

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Racial Prejudice in Young Children: A Case for Multicultural Education

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ABSTRACT

Racial Prejudice in Young Children

A Case for Multicultural Education

Through the review of several research studies, racial prejudice in young children is documented, which the authors believe, is a strong basis for establishing a multicultural education program beginning with preschool children. A schema and a supporting rationale are stated which give direction for program planners of multicultural education at the preschool level.

Many suggested curricular areas for implementing the multicultural education program at the preschool level are given also. The approach taken by the authors provides for a multicultural emphasis to those kinds of activities and experiences normally found in most good preschool programs.

Utilizing the natural developmental curiosity and exploration of young children, coupled with meaningful activities which have a multicultural emphasis, is a necessary step in assisting those children to develop a realistic self-identity which is positive, as well as accepting of others.

Race Awareness in Young Children

The question as to whether young children, aged three and four, are racially aware or racially prejudiced is one that has gained more attention from people in academic circles in the last few years.

According to one study[1], the majority of textbooks on child development and early childhood education ignore the question entirely. This has left readers with the notion that young children are "color blind" and as such are unaware of race and racism.

Although the number of books examined and the procedures employed in the forementioned study are not given, there seems to be general agreement in the literature that young children are beginning to move from the tight circle of family and are starting to show a strong curiosity about people. They ask questions about obvious differences in appearance, in nationality, in religion, in social status, and in work.[2]

Answers given by parents to such questions as, "Why is Mary dark and I'm not?", and "Why does Roberto speak Spanish?", together with gestures and tone of voice help young children form attitudes about people who are different. As children measure themselves against the images of others, feelings of superiority or inferiority are developed. The family, then, plays a basic role in shaping and developing primary social values in children.

A number of writers in the area of preschool education term this nothing more than racial awareness for children aged three and four. However, an early study[3] reported, that of the 100 black and white children studied, 25 per cent expressed strong race related values by the age of four.

Extensive assessment of racial preference in young children has been done by Williams and Morland and is reported in their book, Race, Color, and the Young Child.[4] An instrument, PRAM (Preschool Racial Attitude Measure) has been developed and standardized by the authors. PRAM employes colored photographs of human figures with accompanying stories. Except for the sex-role items, both figures are identical, except for skin color; one has medium brown skin (the "Afro-American" figure, and the other has pinkish-tan skin (the "Euro-American" figure). Children are to select the person described in the story.

The PRAM instruments have been used by quite a number of researchers with consistent results, regardless of which part of the United States the study was conducted. Findings show that for pre-school white and black children, a definite pro-white/anti-black bias is shown.

Although used with children who were not pre-schoolers (first and second graders), the CRAM[5] (Chicano Racial Attitude Measure) has demonstrated an overwhelming pro-Anglo, anti-Chicano bias among Chicano as well as Anglo children.

Attitudes of racial bias held by pre-school children develop into racial prejudice as they grow older. Reviewing a number of reported attempts to modify racial prejudicial

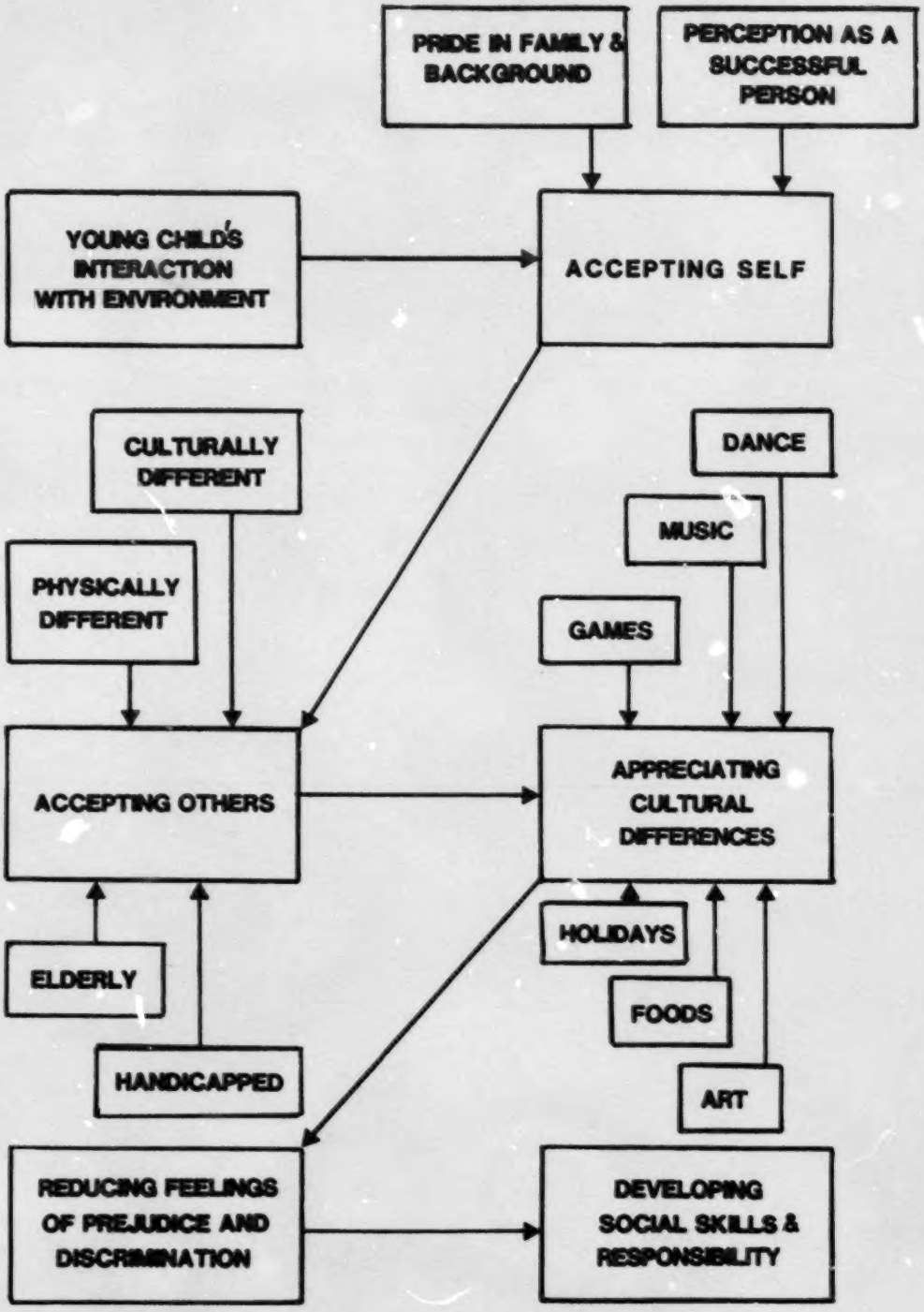
attitudes in elementary aged children, Balch and Paulson[6] conclude that, as a whole, these efforts did not have long lasting positive effects. They conclude that modification of racial attitudes should begin with pre-school children as a preventative strategy.

Prevention of racial prejudicial attitudes should begin with preschool children whose attitudes have not been crystalized, but are in the state of formation. It is our belief that such an objective can be realized in pre-school settings without drastic curricular changes, but by infusing the present curriculum (in most cases) with a multicultural content.

Schema for a Multicultural Education Program

We have developed a schema which, we believe, utilizes the natural developmental sequence of young children, and yet addresses the topic of multicultural education. (See next page.)

SCHEMA FOR A MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR PRESCHOOL CHILDREN



Interpreting the Schema

Our purpose is to interpret the schema, philosophically, at first, and then give some practical illustrations in terms of application. As a young child interacts with his/her environment, he/she develops a sense of personal worth. If the perceived personal worth is a positive one, then this can lead to accepting one's self. Although many factors help one to determine his/her sense of personal worth, two areas, pride in family backgrounds, and perception as a successful person, contribute substantially to the perceived self.

It is generally agreed by many, that if one is accepting of self, then one is capable of accepting others. The others, we have identified in the schema as the culturally different, the physically different, the elderly, and the handicapped. All of these groups are targets of much prejudicial expressions and actions. Not included in the schema, is an area that should be given attention, the stereotyping of women.

Through activities which help young children discover the vast similarities of all people, in spite of other differences, some degree of acceptance of others can be formed. This can lead to the appreciation of cultural differences. Activities such as games, music, dance, holidays, foods, and art which are found in most well-designed pre-school programs should include a cultural dimension so that the multiculturalism is not merely tolerated and recognized, but appreciated, as well.

This kind of approach which gives young children variety and meaning, coupled with a positive interpretation and appreciation for cultural differences, can lead to reduced feelings

(or perhaps prevention) of prejudice and discrimination, which, in turn can lead to the development of social skills and responsibility for pre-school children.

Implementing the Schema

There is a tremendous shortage of material on the market today pertaining to multicultural education for preschool age children. Of the curriculum material that is available, much of it is inappropriate for use with preschool children. More often than not, the major criticisms are that it fails to address the developmental level and capabilities of young children, and neglects reference to instruction for classroom implementation. Although some excellent resource books are available, the question of method of implementation remains.

Multicultural education may be defined as developing in young children a beginning awareness and acceptance of themselves, of others, and an appreciation of cultural and physical differences. The key words in this definition are *beginning awareness*. It is unrealistic to expect to provide pre-school children with a comprehensive tour of the peoples of the globe, or for them to master the art of self-understanding at such a young age. The point is, of course, that multicultural education is a continuing process, and a continuing reponsibility of educators at all levels. At the pre-school level, the goal is to aid the child's development of a *beginning awareness*. of himself and of the world in which he lives.

To begin a multicultural program it is suggested that it be naturally integrated into the already existing curriculum, rather than including it as a separate program in the daily schedule. By adopting a slightly different emphasis on the activities already conducted in the classroom (provided a complete and sound program is in place), an effective program of multicultural education for pre-school children can be achieved.

At this point it is necessary to interject that a pre-requisite for an effective program lies in the teacher's commitment to developing cultural understanding and appreciation. It must be an established personal value and viewed as an integral aspect of a child's training to be successful.

When planning for such an emphasis in the curriculum, the following suggestions are offered: Begin by brainstorming a written list of as many characteristics of everyday life or aspects of a culture as come to mind. Such a list might include:

Homes
Family
Food
Jobs
Schools
Clothing
Sports
Art
Music
Dance
Customs
Holidays
Architecture
Climate
Toys
Games
Language
Transportation
Physical Appearance
Government
Geographical Location
Religion

Secondly, compile a list of the kinds of activities conducted in the classroom. This list would begin with such items as:

Self Concept
Dramatic Play
Field Trips/Visits
Books/Stories
Language Experiences
Music
Cooking
Puppets
Manipulatives
Games
Woodworking
Dance

Art	Constructive Play
Science	Puzzles
Math	
Home Living	

By placing these two lists side by side, begin to identify types of classroom activities that might effectively explore particular aspects of a cultural group. For example, physical appearances of culturally different persons, the handicapped and the elderly can be easily and naturally addressed through a variety of classroom activities. From the list given, potentially appropriate activities might be books/stories, language experiences, dramatic play, self-concept units, field trips/visits, and puppets. Or, explore other aspects such as how birthdays are celebrated around the world. Consider including chopsticks with other utensils in the housekeeping area. Greet the children in various languages. Ideas springing from the cross-relationships between these lists are as limitless as the imagination, while keeping in mind the needs and capabilities of the children.

As this kind of approach permeates the curriculum, the children are naturally and contextually exposed to a variety of global lifestyles and cultural characteristics. It becomes more than a token acknowledgement of the culturally and physically different, but rather a meanirgful exposure to the likenesses and differences of the people of the earth.

Young children are "me" people. They identify with the known before they relate to the unknown. This developmental characteristic has meaning for multicultural education.

Activities need to progress from the known to the unknown, from an understanding of self to an understanding of others. As stated previously, this is a continuous process. Translated into specifics, the "here and now" approach to the lifestyle of themselves and others is appropriate for preschoolers, whereas aspects of historical background need to be reserved for study in later grades.

Another point with regard to implementing a cultural emphasis in the classroom pertains to the integration of various cultural groups for study. Avoid isolating groups individually or presenting a unit on all the aspects of one group only. Rather, consider a more integrated approach whereby a particular aspect of everyday life is explored in a more global context. For instance, an emphasis on clothing would begin with an awareness of the children's own clothing, followed by a look at the clothing of children around the world--identifying likenesses and differences. In the course of presenting the differences of others, it is crucial that they be presented in a positive manner, and as a valued difference. Different must not be equated with being wrong or inferior.

A program such as the one outlined has no prescribed format. Rather, it requires planning and thought. The benefit of such an approach rests in its individuality. It is easily custom-structured to meet the needs of a particular group. Special knowledge or interests of the teacher, parents or children may be emphasized. The program may have

a special focus on nationalities represented in the classroom. It is adaptable to the availability of materials and community resources, and it is integrated into the already existing curriculum.

With deliberate planning, the inclusion of a multicultural emphasis in the preschool program has long-reaching effects. It fosters in children the development of a beginning awareness of self, of others, and an appreciation of cultural and physical differences. A foundation is set for present, as well as future interpersonal relationships and the hoped-for world harmony of tomorrow.

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